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MONTGOMERY

Reprint No. 13

A Sketch of
Judge Anderson Crenshaw

BY

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[From the TRANSACTIONS 1899-1903, Vol. IV]

MONTGOMERY, ALABAMA

1904

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VI. A SKETCH OF JUDGE ANDERSON CRENSHAW.

BY REV. CHARLES EDWARD CRENSHAW,¹ Verbena.

On account of partisan predilections it is hard for the average historian to give an impartial account of political matters or to withhold his prejudice against those who differ with him politically, which is sometimes done by ignoring their names when they should be honorably mentioned in history.

This is seen in Pickett's *History of Alabama*. He was such a strong Andrew Jackson Democrat that he appears to have ignored the names of Henry Clay Whigs. Nicholas Davis, of Limestone, is the only one in that party that he mentioned with much favor. He could not ignore his name without leaving an ugly gap in the first decade of Alabama history, for Davis served in the Alabama legislature as president of the senate during this entire decade, being elected to that office ten times. Pickett's partisan partiality is seen in his notice of Alabama's first judges, among whom were Saffold and Crenshaw, the former a Democrat and the latter a Whig. He gives a full account of Saffold's life without even mentioning the name of Anderson Crenshaw.

As an account of the life of the latter as well as of his contemporaries should be found in the histories of Alabama, I will now give a short sketch of him. He was a native of Newberry district, South Carolina, and was born 1786.

His parents were Charles² (born in Va.) and Eunice (*White*) Crenshaw, and his grandparents were William (of Va.) and Susanna (*Parr*) Crenshaw, and John and Elizabeth (*Lee*) White. The children of Charles Crenshaw were: (1) Arch Crenshaw,

¹ Charles Edward Crenshaw, son of Judge Anderson Crenshaw, was born Aug. 8, 1821, at Cahaba, Ala. He received a good primary education, and graduated at the University of Alabama in the class of 1843, with the degree of bachelor of arts. Embracing the faith of the Methodist Protestant Church, he entered the ministry of that denomination, and for many years labored faithfully. He is now located, and although at an advanced age, gives much attention to his business interests. He was married (1) April 8, 1847, at Hickory Grove, Montgomery county, Ala., to Mary Louisa Coleman, by whom he has several children, and (2) in Aug., 1877, to Lydia Grout Shaw.

² Chapman's edition of O'Neill's *Annals of Newberry* (1892), p. 53-54. (301)

who married ——; (2) Dr. Abner, who married Charlotta, daughter of Gen. John A. Elmore, a Revolutionary soldier (Bolling Hall, Jr., of Coosada, married a daughter of Abner Crenshaw); (3) Anderson, my father, of whom I will speak at length; (4) Walter, who died unmarried; (5) Willis, who married Amanda, daughter of Walter Chiles; and (6) Phoebe, an only daughter who died young unmarried.

Charles Crenshaw was one of the early settlers of Newberry district and served as tax collector from a very early day until 1812. He was one of the founders and patrons of Mount Bethel academy, where his son Anderson Crenshaw received his preparatory education for the South Carolina College at Columbia, where he graduated in 1806. He was the first graduate of that institution, being the only member of the class of 1806.

He studied law with Judge Abraham Nott, of Columbia and was admitted to the bar in 1809. He settled at Newberry for the practice. James Belton O'Neill in his *Annals of Newberry* says: "He came to the bar with a most accurate knowledge of his profession. To him, more than any one else, may be ascribed the character of the Newberry bar for legal knowledge and industry. He presented the example which has had good effect for forty years."

In 1812 he was elected to the legislature of South Carolina.

In 1815 he married Mary Chiles, daughter of Thomas Chiles, of Abbeville, S. C. His two sons, Walter and Thomas Crenshaw, were born in Newberry.

In 1819 he removed to Alabama and settled at Cahaba, the capital of the State, and here about the end of this year a daughter was born who died in infancy. In 1821 at the same place his third son (the writer) was born on the 8th of August. This was the year he was elected judge. After he came to Cahaba he was troubled by the high waters of the Alabama river. The town was on the bank of that river at the junction of the Cahaba. At one time during a great freshet the waters of the rivers came up to the doorsteps and my mother had to use a little boat to get to the kitchen, smoke house and outhouses.

In the fall of 1822 he removed to Butler county, one of the lower counties of his circuit. He rented a two room log cabin from Mansel Womack (the father of Lewis and John W. Wo-

mack) in which he lived with his family until he built a more comfortable house. In 1824 his fourth son, Frederick W., was born. This residence in Butler was two miles from the present village of Manningham.

Judge C. purchased some very rich land on Cedar creek on which he started a plantation but derived little income from this source, as he could not give it sufficient attention on account of his official duties. As his circuit lay in quite a new and rough country with very bad roads he was compelled to travel on horseback to all his courts, which impaired his constitution and probably shortened his life. When we came to Butler county in 1822 we settled among very good neighbors, some of whom were friends and kinsmen from North and South Carolina, among whom were Dr. John Coleman, Wm. H. Wade, and Thomas Bragg, of North Carolina; Richard Ringgold, of Maryland; Maj. Patton and Mansel Womack, of Georgia. Most of these were among the first settlers of Butler county. There was a very common school house in the neighborhood at which my brothers Walter and Thomas first went to school. About the year 1828 a large brick house was erected at which we boys all went to school as we got old enough. From this school brothers Walter and Thomas went to college at Tuscaloosa in 1831. Thomas remained there only one year, but Walter stayed there three years and graduated in 1834. About the year 1833, when brother Thomas was going to school at the brick house, one day about 5 p. m., a very severe storm passed over our house going towards the school house, blowing down a great many trees on the way. My father got very uneasy about the safety of brother Thomas. As soon as the storm was over he started to look for him. He got to the school house without meeting him and found that the pupils had gone home. As there were two ways to the school house he came back the other way and found brother T. at home. He did not start to come until the storm was over.

During the year 1834 Thomas A. Walker, of Benton county, read law with my father, and in consideration of his board at our house he taught brother Fred. and myself in our primary studies. He graduated at the Alabama University in 1833. He became a successful lawyer, and was elected judge of the circuit court.

In the year 1844 Judge Crenshaw was a strong Henry Clay

man but this did not affect his re-election by a Democratic legislature at its next session as I will notice below.

My father did not belong to any church, but he was a firm Christian, and read the Bible a great deal and endeavored to live according to its precepts. He contributed to the support of the Methodist Protestant Church at Mt. Zion. Old Mr. Samuel Oliver, a minister of that church who lived in Greenville, was a great friend to him and became more so after he received a favor in a business transaction with him. One fall Mr. Oliver bought my father's entire cotton crop in the seed after it was gathered at a certain price which he agreed to pay after he sold it. So when he sold the cotton he came to our house to settle for it and showed the account of sales, which proved that he had lost a considerable amount in the trade. My father took from the debt all that Oliver had lost. I recall how all the people in the neighborhood were expressing their admiration of this kindness to Mr. Oliver, thinking it was obeying the Savior who commanded us to help the poor and needy. Judge Crenshaw showed his faith in the Christian religion while transacting the duties of his office, especially in passing sentence on prisoners condemned to death. He would urge on them with all his power the necessity of repentance and a preparation to meet their Maker in the great day of judgment.

He served on the supreme court with the other circuit judges until 1832, and then only as circuit judge until 1839, when he was elected chancellor of the newly created and organized court of chancery, defeating J. B. Clark, of Greene, Robert McAlpine, of Mobile, and Edmund S. Dargan, of Montgomery. He was elected the second time to this office in 1844. In this election, the first time in all his official life, much effort was made to defeat him on account of his political opinions. He had just voted for Henry Clay for president. The strong partisan Democrats tried to defeat him with Gen. George Crabb who had deserted the Whigs in the recent presidential election and voted for James K. Polk. He was elected by only twenty votes over Crabb, all the Whigs and many of the Democrats voting for him. He lived but a few years longer and died in the summer of 1847. Garrett says in *Public Men of Alabama* that "His virtues as a man and his abilities and integrity as a judge gained the public confidence from the beginning of his long administration of justice,

which he retained to the last," and after the impeachment and trial with his associates Saffold and White before the legislature of 1829. He adds, "The judges passed through the ordeal triumphantly and each received from the legislature new token of confidence."

In physical make-up Judge Crenshaw was rather slender, being five feet and eleven inches high, and weighing about 135 pounds.

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